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ABSTRACT

The conquest and colonization of Mexico initiated by Hernan Cortes resulted in the fusion of the Indian and Hispanic cultures. This fusion led to the "mestizo" culture. Cortes was the bearer of the Hispanic heritage just as the Aztecs and other Indians in Mexico and the Southwest were the carriers of the Indian heritage. In studying the life of Cortes, he is seen not only as a military conqueror but also as a colonizer in which role he left a more lasting legacy than he did as the victor over the Aztec Empire. This booklet focuses on Cortes' colonizing efforts. In narrating the story, the teacher can stress the religious motivation of Cortes, the building of towns and cities, the introduction of Spanish political and economic institutions, agricultural products, mining and the Spanish language. At the same time the conqueror regarded the Indian as a Spanish citizen, whose civilization had much to offer to enrich what the Spaniard brought. Intended as a teaching tool, the booklet is intended primarily for elementary teachers. However, it can also be profitably used by junior and senior high school teachers. A brief select bibliography is included to provide additional sources which go into greater detail. Added to the bibliography are sources geared to the elementary and secondary levels and audio-visual aid materials. (Author/NQ)

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HERNAN CORTES

CONQUISTADOR AND COLONIZER

HUBERT J. MILLER

The Tinker Pamphlet Series
for
The Teaching of Mexican American Heritage

RC 008852

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The Tinker Pamphlet Series
for
The Teaching of Mexican American Heritage

Printed by
New Santander Press

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To my mother
and in
memory of my father

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GLOSSARY

Alcalde—Town mayor or magistrate.

Audiencia—Highest court in Mexico; also took on certain administrative and judicial functions.

Barrio—City district; ward; quarter; suburb.

Cabildo—Municipal council.

Conquistador—Conqueror.

Encomendero—Holder of an *encomienda*.

Encomienda—Grant of authority over Indians; carried obligation to Christianize and protect them as well as right to collect tribute.

Hacendado—Owner of an *hacienda*.

Hacienda—Plantation or large ranch.

Hispaniola—A West Indies island which today consists of the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

Mestizo—A mixture of a Spaniard and Indian.

Regidor—A councilman or member of a *cabildo*.

Repartimiento—A division or allotment of Indian laborers for a particular project.

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A NOTE TO THE TEACHER

The conquest and colonization of Mexico initiated by Hernán Cortés resulted in the fusion of the Indian and Hispanic cultures. This fusion or *mestizo* culture is the proud legacy of today's Mexican and Mexican American. Cortés was the bearer of the Hispanic heritage just as the Aztecs and other Indians in Mexico and the Southwest were the carriers of the Indian heritage. In studying the life of Cortés the teacher will see Cortés not simply as a military conqueror but also as a colonizer in which role he left a more lasting legacy than he did as the victor over the Aztec Empire. It is the aim of the booklet to focus on colonizing efforts of the man from Estremadura, Spain. In narrating the story to the students the teacher can stress the religious motivation of Cortés, the building of towns and cities, the introduction of Spanish political and economic institutions, agricultural products, mining and the Spanish language. At the same time the conqueror regarded the Indian as a Spanish citizen, whose civilization had much to offer to enrich what the Spaniard brought. Cortés brought cattle but the Indian had his corn.

The story of the forerunner of the Mexican-American heritage can profitably be told in conjunction with other New World explorers and colonizers, such as the English, Dutch or French. For instance, the teacher in a discussion format can compare and contrast Cortés with English

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explorers and colonizers. In the use of audio-visual aids on explorations in the New World, the booklet can provide informative facts for the teacher to discuss, which are normally overlooked in the audio-visual presentations. In short, the story of Cortés forms a very important part of the broader account of the New World opening up to the Old World. When it comes to arousing interest and color, the Spanish *conquistador* has few peers among Europeans who arrived first on the American scene.

The booklet is intended as a teaching tool—not a textbook for the students. It can serve as a timesaving device wherein the teacher will quickly find essential biographical information. The effectiveness of the tool, like all teaching tools, in final analysis is dependent on the teacher's creative use of it in the classroom. Instructional content, grade level and intellectual ability of the pupils are all determining factors in selecting all or some of the material to be utilized in the classroom. Although the tool is intended primarily for elementary teachers, it can also be profitably used by junior and senior secondary instructors.

At the end of the pamphlet the teacher will find a brief select bibliography that can be of help should he desire to go into greater detail. Much has been written on Cortés and, needless to say, many works are very polemical—not surprising for a man who was a center of controversy throughout his life. I have selected secondary sources that present a more balanced account and at the same time provide insights that may be of help to the teacher. The bibliography also includes Cortés'

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own writings and the account of Bernal Díaz del Castillo, who accompanied the *conquistador* on the expedition, and Francisco López de Gómara, who although not an eyewitness to the events was Cortés' secretary. These first hand accounts provide the teacher with more intimate perceptions than the standard secondary sources. Added to the bibliography are sources geared to the elementary and secondary levels and audio-visual aid materials.

I am greatly indebted to the Tinker Foundation in New York for making this project possible. Not only did the Foundation make it possible by providing time to do the pamphlet, but it also has underwritten the costs of publication and distribution of the pamphlet. It is my hope that the publication in some small measure fulfills the aspirations of Dr. Edward Larocque Tinker, who was ever conscious of the need for building bridges between the peoples of the Latin and the Anglo heritage. Further words of gratitude are in order for my student aids, whose typing and research facilitated the completion of the pamphlet. Last but not least special appreciation is in order for my wife, Doris, through whose patience, proof reading and typing, many of the burdens of seeing the project to its completion were greatly relieved.

Hubert J. Miller

Pan American University
March, 1972

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INTRODUCTION

The contradictory behavior of the Spanish *conquistadores* may not always make for easy presentation in the classroom. On the one hand their courage and audacity in military conquests tends to arouse awe if not admiration, but on the other hand, their treatment of Indians evokes condemnation. They end up being both heroes and villains. The *conquistadores* have much in common with the American frontiersmen who played the roles of hero and villain equally well. The Spanish conquerors, like the frontiersmen, were first and foremost human beings with their virtues and vices. Both were convinced beyond a doubt that what they did was justified.

The Spaniard saw the conquest as a religious crusade which brought Christianity and a better way of life to the Indians. The religious crusade was stimulated by reports of precious metals, which frequently may have served as a stronger motivation than the religious one. Similarly the Anglo frontiersmen had various motivations in his drive westward. In his case, it was conquering or pushing the Indians out of the way to make for a better life for the frontiersmen.

By today's standards the rationale of the *conquistadores* and frontiersmen will receive little, if any, approval. Such was not the case with a Cortés or a Daniel Boone. Both harbored few doubts about the justice of their works. They saw themselves as carriers of European civilization to a

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primitive and inferior people. It was a Christian mission, sanctioned and destined by God. Historians have aptly described it as Manifest Destiny.

EARLY LIFE

Hernán Cortés was born in 1485 in Medellín, in the province of Estremadura(Spain), the birthplace of many *conquistadores*. Estremadura was a sunburned landscape, treeless and sparsely populated. It possessed qualities of austerity and endurance which challenged its hearty inhabitants. The terrain and climate served the *conquistador* well in preparing him for ordeals of Mexico whose geography and climate had much in common with the Spanish province. Furthermore, the none-too-productive soil of Estremadura made the promise of wealth in the New World that much more attractive.

His parents, Martín Cortés de Monroy and Catalina Pizarro Altamirano, were of ancient, noble, and honorable stock. Like many noblemen of the late Renaissance period, their heritage was more evident in their coat-of-arms than in their wealth. His father was a military captain, but his son's frail health was not well suited for such an arduous career. This fact may have prompted his parents to send him at the age of fourteen to undertake law studies at the University of Salamanca. Without completing his studies after a two year stay, he returned to Medellín, convinced that his life's work was in the military profession.

His military aspirations were undoubtedly

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influenced by the stories of the knights of chivalry, the best-sellers of his day. Furthermore, his home was close to Granada where in January of 1492 the last Moslem stronghold was toppled. Medellín was also close to the port of Palos where Columbus in the same year started his epic voyage westward. The reports of Columbus and other explorers to the Indies must have aroused the fertile imagination of a teenager, who was looking for new fields of endeavor. The reconquest of Spain from the Moslems was ended but the conquest of America was beginning. As was frequently true in his subsequent career, he was at the right place at the right time.

TRIP TO THE WEST INDIES

The opportune moment for Cortés' trip to the New World came when Nicolás de Ovando, recently appointed governor of Hispaniola, was preparing to sail for the settlement in Santo Domingo. Since the young adventurer was acquainted with the Ovando family, he readily secured passage. Unfortunately, a near fatal accident which resulted from an amorous affair prevented his departure. After a brief sojourn in Valencia and Italy, he returned to Estremadura where at the age of 19 a second opportunity arose in 1504 to go to the West Indies.

Shortly after his arrival there he displayed his military ability in aiding the commander, Diego Velásquez, in putting down an Indian uprising in Hispaniola. Governor Ovando rewarded the young *conquistador* with land and a *repartimiento* which

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entitled him to a certain number of Indian laborers on his estate. The quiet life on an *hacienda*, raising crops, breeding sheep and horses, had little appeal for the young gentleman. More in keeping with his interests was the military expedition of Diego Velásquez in 1511 to subjugate the Indians on the island of Cuba. Again he proved himself a most capable military leader and for his services he received new grants of land and Indian laborers. His new *hacienda* was located near the town of Santiago, in the extreme southern portion of the island, and close to the *hacienda* of Juan Juárez.

It was an amorous affair with one of the daughters of Juárez that almost lead to his undoing. The situation became more complicated when it was discovered that Velásquez, the recently appointed governor of Cuba, was in love with another daughter of Juárez and entertained doubts about Cortés' loyalty to him. After several attempts on the part of the future *conquistador* to escape the romantic net, the governor prevailed on him to marry the girl. The reconciliation reinstated Cortés in good favor with the governor who appointed him *alcalde* of Santiago. With further promotions he became secretary and treasurer to the governor. Thus at the age of 26, besides being an *hacendado*, he was a royal official and the governor's favorite.

Again the sedentary *hacienda* life did not satisfy the restless and ambitious Cortés, whose attention was focused on the reports of the Francisco Hernándes de Córdoba expedition in 1517 and the one of Juan de Grijalva in 1518 to the coast of Yucatán. The latter never returned. The

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opportunities for more slaves and gold spurred Governor Velásquez to action. It was only natural that the governor looked to his young favorite to carry out a new expedition to Yucatán. Although he had some last minute doubts about sending such an ambitious and highly qualified man on the mission, the governor granted the required license that permitted Cortés to begin preparation for the expedition. The governor's suspicions were well founded since shortly after landing at Vera Cruz, Cortés refused to recognize the authority of Velásquez. The soon-to-be governor of Mexico was thirty-four. His long cherished ambition of heading an expedition was on the verge of realization.

EXPEDITION TO YUCATAN

The instructions of the governor dated October 23, 1518 listed the objectives for the trip, which included the search for possible survivors of the ill-fated Grijalva expedition who might still be alive and held captive by the Indians in Yucatán. He was to learn more about the Indians, plant life and mineral wealth of the area, with the usual advice to look for the legendary Amazon women, and to barter for gold and silver. The instructions were not explicit regarding the possibility of settlement. In this matter they merely stated that Cortés should take possession of the land that he discovered and induce the Indians to accept Christianity. Such latitude in the hands of the young commander could easily become a license for settlement. The vagueness of the instructions set the stage for the subsequent controversy

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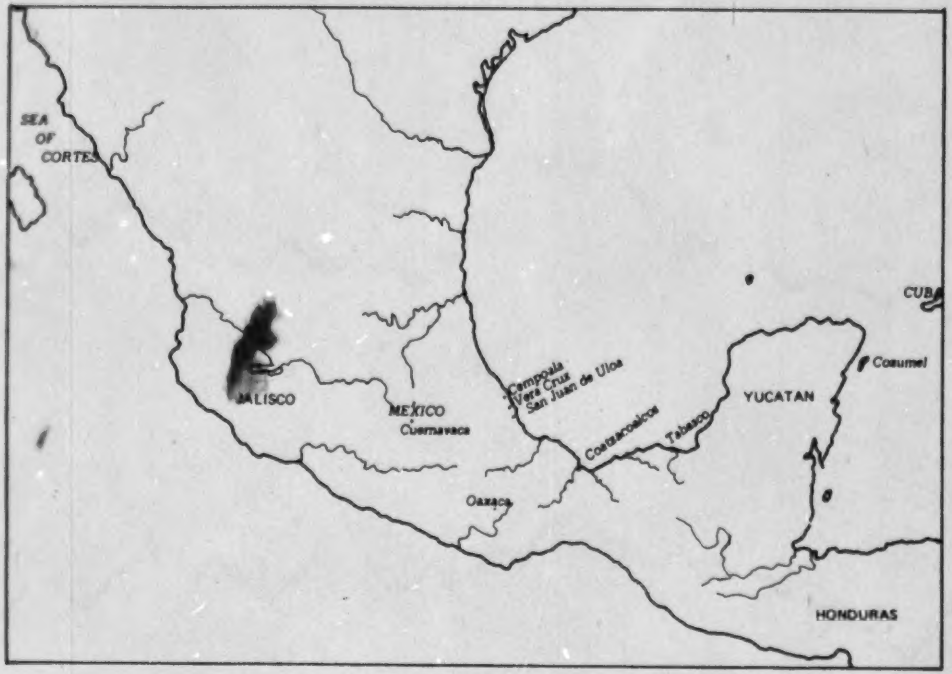

MEXICO AT THE TIME OF THE CONQUEST

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between Cortés and Governor Velásquez over Cortés' exceeding the governor's instructions by starting an independent settlement.

Expeditions were essentially private enterprise undertakings, from which the *conquistadores*, their soldiers and financial supporters expected due returns. Cortés had accumulated a substantial fortune during his brief residence in the West Indies and the major portion of this was invested in the enterprise. The expedition included 508 soldiers, thirteen musketeers, thirty-two archers, eleven boats, sixteen horses, ten pieces of bronze artillery and four small cannons.

Among the noteworthy soldiers who accompanied Cortés there were Pedro de Alvarado, the future *conquistador* of Guatemala; Cristóbal de Olid; Alonso de Avila; Francisco de Montejo, later governor of Yucatán; Juan Velásquez de León, relative of Governor Velásquez; Gonzalo de Sandoval; Alonzo Hernández de Puertocarrero, a favorite of Cortés; and Bernal Díaz del Castillo, the famous chronicler of the conquest of Mexico. Some of the men had been on previous trips to Yucatán and could offer invaluable experience to their captain.

The armada set sail on February 10, 1519, under the banner carrying the inscription: "Friends, let us follow the cross with true faith, with which we will conquer." It was a fitting motto for a *conquistador* who believed his cause to be divinely blessed. Pedro Alvarado, in command of one of the ships, was the first to arrive at the island of Cozumel off the eastern coast of Yucatán. He immediately plundered one of the Indian temples

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and spread much fear among the Indians. Cortés on his arrival ordered an end to the plundering because he desired to gain the good will of the Indians. His policy was to seek conciliation with the Indians and war was justified only when the Indians remained hostile.

After landing on the coast of Yucatán, Cortés encountered Maya Indians and survivors from the Grijalva expedition—namely Jerónimo de Aguilar and Gonzalo Guerrero. The former joined Cortés and knowing the Maya tongue he served as a valuable interpreter. The latter who had married an Indian and even participated in an Indian attack against the Spaniards refused to rejoin his countrymen.

From Cozumel the armada sailed around the eastern tip of Yucatán and then westward to Tabasco, where Cortés found one of his most important assets for the later conquest. Here the initial Indian reception was hostile but due to Cortés' magnanimous treatment of Indian prisoners and successful efforts to establish good relations with the Indians, the Indian chief gave him and his men twenty Indian women, among whom was Marina, more popularly known as "Malinche." Malinche, who spoke the Nahuatl (Aztec) tongue, came from an aristocratic family in the province of Coatzacualcos, located southeast of Vera Cruz. She had been sold into slavery by her mother to the Indians in Tabasco where she learned the Maya tongue.

With her linguistic ability and the ability of Aguilar to speak Maya it became possible for Cortés to communicate with the various Indian

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groups under the domination of the Aztec Empire in central Mexico. Her aristocratic background was immediately recognized by the Spaniards who accorded her the noble title of *Doña*. She along with the other Indian women accepted Christianity—a condition Cortés considered indispensable for accepting them as gifts from the Indian chief. Malinche became the mistress of Cortés and after the conquest the wife of Puertocarrero.

The commander undoubtedly found her talents opportune for his venture as he also found her opportune to use as a mistress but not as a married partner, for that was a permanent matter. First, he already was married and if he were free to marry again it hopefully would be a marriage into a socially prominent family in Spain. *Barragana* was part of the Spanish tradition which permitted the sanctity of a monogamous marriage alongside concubinage. In fact it was so well recognized that the chaplain in Cortés' army, Fr. Bartolomé de Olmedo, never raised his voice of protest against the practice.

Although Malinche and her companions served as concubines they were still *doñas* and even the nobility of their offspring was recognized as was the case of Martín Cortés, the son of Malinche and the *conquistador*. These early Spaniards showed themselves favorable to the idea of social and racial equality in their relations with the Indians. Of greater and more lasting significance is the fact that out of these racial unions, which at times were concubinage and at other times regular religious marriages, came the *mestizo*, the ancestor of the

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Mexican and Mexican American today.

From Tabasco Cortés and his party sailed for San Juan de Ulua, a small island in the harbor of Vera Cruz, where on Holy Thursday of 1519 they met a group of Indians who lived near the coast. Through Malinche the Indians were told that the captain's intentions were peaceful. On the next day, Good Friday, he landed on the coast where he met Totonac Indians who inhabited the nearby city of Cempoala. The commander's meeting with the Totonac chieftain provided him with information about Moctezuma, whom the Totonacs feared and hated because of the tribute and victims for human sacrifice they had to give the Aztec ruler. Cortés immediately realized in the Totonac chieftain a valuable ally in his march to Tenochtitlán, the seat of Aztec power in the valley of Anáhuac, the location of present day Mexico City. After the destruction of the Totonac religious idols and the preaching of Fr. Olmedo he succeeded in converting them to Christianity and winning their allegiance.

Cortés' initial success with the Indians was offset by growing dissension among his followers. The partisans of Governor Velásquez argued in favor of returning to Cuba while the supporters of Cortés were ready to follow him anywhere. The latter with the cooperation of their captain presented a plan calling for settlement and the founding of a city. The whole affair gave the appearance of the captain bowing to the will of his followers and at the same time severing his bonds of obedience to Governor Velásquez.

The settlement, called Villa Rica de Vera Cruz,

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was officially established with the setting up of council known as a *cabildo*. The *cabildo* consisted of *regidores* (councilors) and two magistrates called *alcaldes*. All of these were appointees of Cortés who in turn nominated their leader as governor and commander of the newly claimed territory. All of these proceedings were duly recorded by a notary and forwarded to the crown, thereby legalizing the *conquistador*'s governorship. To make his action even more pleasing to the crown he persuaded his followers to surrender all their booty gained thus far as gifts to the king. The act of erecting a town before the actual process of colonization was in keeping with Spanish tradition which required the setting up of a city government in laying claim to a territory. Cortés called his new city Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz, later shortened to Vera Cruz. According to Spanish custom he immediately ordered the laying out of the municipality in rectangular form with designated sites for the central plaza, the church, the *cabildo* or town-hall, the gallows and prison. Cortés symbolically carried the first stone for the foundations but the main work was done by Indian laborers in the vicinity. Not only had the new governor regularized his authority over the newly claimed possessions for his king, Charles I, but he also had established a base of operations for the forthcoming conquest into the interior of Mexico.

The election of Cortés as governor of Vera Cruz did not completely satisfy the followers of Velásquez. Even the appointment of Francisco de Montejo, a member of the Velásquez faction, as one of the *alcaldes* did not remove the threat of

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rebellion against Cortés. To further minimize the threat of the Velásquez faction, he ordered all the ships with the exception of one to be destroyed. The one remaining was for those desiring to return to Cuba whom he called cowards. The strategy had its desired effect since no one volunteered to leave and with that he destroyed the last ship, which was the last means of escape. To make his authority more impressive, he ordered the execution of two men whom he considered ringleaders in the Velásquez faction. Having secured an alliance with the Totonacs, the new governor was ready to begin his march to visit Moctezuma, about whom he had heard much in his conversations with the Indians.

MARCH TO TENOCHTITLAN

During his stay at Vera Cruz, Cortés had received gifts from the messengers of Moctezuma. The Aztec emperor hoped that the gifts would satisfy the *conquistador* and therefore not carry out his intention of marching to Tenochtitlán, the Aztec capital. Unfortunately for Moctezuma, the gifts had the opposite effect since they made Cortés more determined to visit Moctezuma's city.

In mapping out his itinerary Cortés had two alternatives—a southern route through Orizaba or a northern one through Jalapa. He selected the shorter northern route which led through the territory of Tlaxcala. His army consisted of 400 infantry, 15 cavalry, 6 cannons, 1,300 Totonac Indians and 200 other Indians to serve as burden bearers. He was ready to begin one of the most memorable marches in history, which began on a

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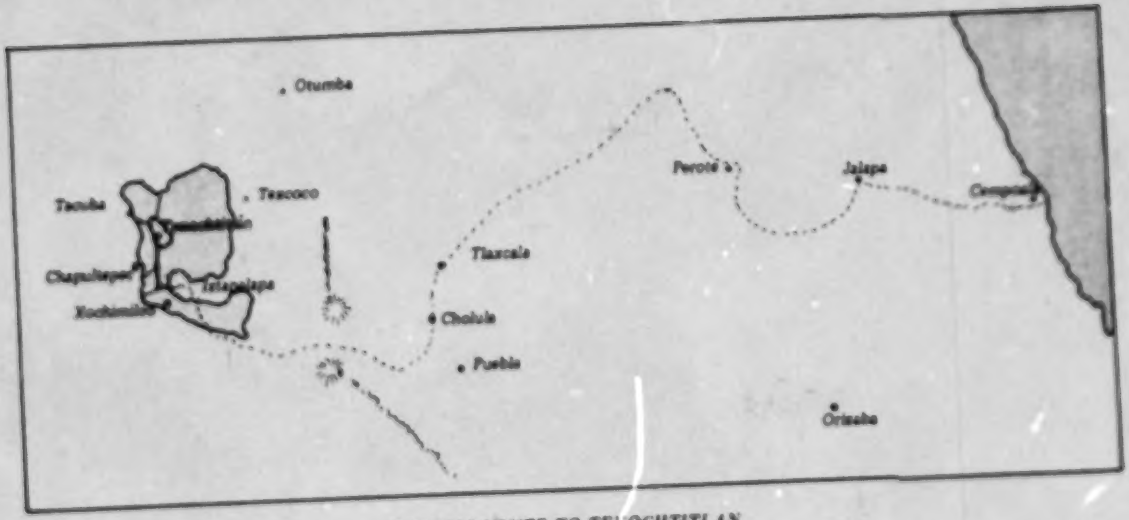

CORTES' ROUTE TO TENOCHTITLAN

tropical coast, crossed a two mile high mountain range and terminated in the delightful Valley of Anáhuac, some 7,000 feet above sea level.

He started his march on August 16, 1519, and as he neared the city of Tlaxcala he sought to secure an alliance with that tribe and gain permission to pass through their country. The Tlaxcalans had mixed reactions towards the strange invaders and secretly decided to make war on the Spaniards. The superiority of military discipline, tactics, firearms, horses and a large number of Indian allies gave Cortés and his men a decided advantage.

After their defeat he gained another invaluable Indian ally against the common enemy—the Aztecs. He achieved another alliance with the neighboring king of Texcoco, which raised his number of Indian allies to 6,000. The Indian allies had long standing grievances against the Aztec emperor and Cortés' arrival on the scene became an opportune moment to vent their revenge. For the Spanish leader the Indians proved invaluable in his conquest plans, but for the Indians it was a civil war against the Aztec emperor and oppressor.

As was the case with Indians in Cempoala, Cortés did not forget his obligation of seeking the Christianization of all of his Indian allies. For the *conquistador* the uprooting of Indian idolatry made the conquest war just. After his peaceful efforts at converting the Tlaxcalans failed, he decided to use more drastic measures, such as the destruction of idols and altars. At the insistence of Fr. Olmedo he did not invoke these harsh measures since it could result in an adverse reaction and

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jeopardize the entire expedition. The chaplain advised patience and peaceful persuasion in the Christianization of the Indians. This was hard advice for the overly zealous and impatient Cortés, but advice that reaped innumerable benefits for the captain in the hard days ahead.

With his greatly augmented army of Indian allies Cortés continued his march on October 13 to Cholula, next to present day Puebla, a city that was a traditional enemy of the Tlaxcalans. Cholula was a famous religious center of the Aztecs and a strong ally of Moctezuma. It was here according to Indian tradition that Quetzalcoatl, the Aztec god and warrior, had enjoyed his golden rule before his departure. The city consisted of many temples, the grandest of which honored Quetzalcoatl. For Cortés, Cholula with its many temples and irrigation system and Tlaxcala far surpassed many of the beautiful cities in Spain. As he made clear in his letters to the king, Cortés was rapidly falling in love with the beauties of his newly found country.

The Cholulans offered signs of hospitality to Cortés and his men but refused to welcome the Tlaxcalans, their traditional enemies, into their midst. The Spanish commander quickly detected that the hospitality was not genuine, especially when the promised food supply ended and women were removed from the city. His suspicions were fully confirmed when Malinche reported to him that an ambush was being laid for his army. The captain realized the precariousness of his position and immediately made preparations for an attack on the Cholulans, which resulted in a massacre of some 6,000 Indians.

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The governor ordered an end to the carnage especially when he realized that his allies, the Tlaxcalans, were using the assault to reap revenge on their hated enemy. Evidence supports Cortés' contention that a dangerous Cholulan conspiracy was in the making but contemporary writers and historians find if difficult to justify the harsh measures used to suppress the rebellion. The punishment certainly did not fit the crime.

The Cholulan incident made it clear that his policy of conciliation and peaceful Christianization was not working out, and as a last resort he was not averse to the use of violence to gain his end. He viewed conquest as an imperial mission divinely sanctioned to unite all men in one family of one faith. Cortés, like many of his contemporaries, subscribed to the idea that with the advent of Christianity the pagan Indians as well as the infidel Moslems in Spain no longer enjoyed the natural rights of liberty, property and sovereignty. It was St. Peter and his successors in Rome who now enjoyed the right of disposition regarding natural rights in temporal matters. Cortés had his proof in Pope Alexander VI's 1493 line of demarcation which gave Spain and Portugal the right to Christianize, take possession and rule in the New World.

The Spanish governor demonstrated both military and political leadership. Although his first objective was peace, he could and did use reprisals against Indians and Spaniards when he felt it necessary. He knew how to coax and lull his enemy, but he also knew how to subdue an enemy. Divide and rule was an ever present formula in

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effecting the conquest. His political conduct of clothing strong armed rule in democratic dress would have aroused the envy of many a Renaissance Machiavellian prince.

His desire to revert to a peaceful policy in Cholula is very much in evidence in his report to the crown when he remarked that on the morning after the massacre the Indians were returning to their normal every day activities. It was obvious wishful thinking on the part of the *conquistador*, but he did remain in Cholula until November 1 reorganizing the city and thereby gaining new loyal subjects and Christians for the king. Voluntary or involuntary loyalty of the Cholulans was essential to Cortés, who was ready to make the final leg of the journey to Tenochtitlán. Still not realizing what was in store for him in the Mexican capital, he could ill afford a dangerous enemy in his rear..

CONQUEST OF TENOCHTITLAN

Shortly after his departure from Cholula, the captain was met by another embassy of Aztec officials bearing gifts from their emperor, Moctezuma. The emperor still sought to discourage the Spaniards from going to Tenochtitlán. Moctezuma since first hearing of the the arrival of Cortés on Mexican soil was not sure whether he was dealing with a man or a deity. Strange phenomena in nature had recently occurred in the Aztec capital—signs which the Aztec ruler and many of his priests interpreted as the fulfillment of the prophesy of the return of Quetzalcoatl.

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According to the prophesy Quetzalcoatl, an ancient Toltec deity of knowledge represented by the plumed serpent, had left his people. Reportedly after his work of being peaceful and uniting the Mayas in Yucatan he passed on to Guatemala with the promise to return one day by the eastern sea, together with white and bearded men. Apparently convinced that the *conquistador* might be the returning Quetzalcoatl, the emperor vacillated in meeting with force the advancing army.

The meeting of the two rulers became a reality when the army of Cortés arrived at the gates of the Aztec city on November 8, 1519. Moctezuma extended a most cordial reception to the invading force since he feared that he might be dealing with the return of Quetzalcoatl. The Spanish commander was quick to see the advantage that the prophesy had for his own designs; namely the peaceful assimilation of the Aztec people into good Christians and loyal Spanish citizens. Furthermore, Cortés was impressed with the beautiful city of Tenochtitlán which surpassed anything he had seen in Mexico; in fact, its beauty and greatness caused him to describe it as "the most beautiful city in the world".

According to eye witness accounts the number of the inhabitants of Tenochtitlán ranged between 300,000 to 400,000 with some 60,000 homes. It certainly must have ranked as one of the greatest cities in the world at that time. The thought of destroying such grandeur horrified the Spanish governor and therefore a peaceful conquest was more imperative than ever. Consequently the

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Spanish commander's strategy was to rule Mexico through Moctezuma. Unfortunately for Cortés and Moctezuma there was an Aztec faction that did not see the Spaniard as the Quetzalcoatl but saw Moctezuma as a weakling and traitor.

Cortés spent the first five months in the Aztec capital surveying the city and studying the customs and life of its inhabitants. The city was built on an island in Lake Texcoco. The water passages between the houses immediately reminded the Spaniards of Venice. The entire city was protected by drawbridges over the three causeways, which led to the island from the shores of the lake. The military commander fully understood that the failure to secure control over at least one of these causeways could completely isolate his forces on the island and lead to defeat. The chronicler Bernal Díaz del Castillo, who was a member of the conquest expedition, provides ample testimony of the many things that Cortés and his men saw shortly after their arrival in the city

> Then Moctezuma took him by the hand and bade him look at his great city and all the other cities rising from the water, and the many towns around the lake; and if he had not seen the market place well, he said, he could see it from here much better.
>
> There we stood looking, for that large and evil temple was so high that it towered over everything. From there we could see all three of the causeways that led into Mexico: the road from Iztapalapa, by which we had entered four days earlier; the Tacuba road, by which we fled the night of our great rout; and the road from Tepeaquilla (Guadalupe).
>
> We saw the fresh water that came from Chapultepec, which supplied the city, and the bridges on the three causeways, built at certain intervals so that the water could go from one part of the lake to another, and a multitude of canoes, some arriving with provisions and others leaving with merchandise. We saw that every house in this great city and in the others built on the water could be reached only by wooden drawbridges or by canoe. We saw temples built like towers and fortresses in their cities, all whitewashed; it was a sight to see. We could look down on the flat-roofed houses and

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other little towers and temples like fortresses along the causeways.

After taking a good look and considering all that we had seen, we looked again at the great square and the throngs of people, some buying and others selling. The buzzing of their voices could be heard more than a league away. There were soldiers among us who had been in many parts of the world, in Constantinople and Rome and all over Italy, who said that they had never before seen a market place so large and so well laid out, and so filled with people [1]

The grandeur of the Aztec temple made Cortés more determined than ever to secure the submission of the Aztec nation to the Spanish crown. He demanded that the emperor punish his subjects who were responsible for the harm inflicted on his Indian allies in Cempoala and the killing of Juan de Escalante, the commander of the garrison at Vera Cruz. The emperor's willingness to honor the demands made Cortés more insistent on having the Aztec monarch summon his nobles and publicly acknowledge the submission of the Aztec people to the King of Spain.

As proof of loyalty the Spanish governor called for a tribute of approximately 3,500,000 pesos of gold in addition to other objects of value. The submissive attitude of the monarch irritated many of his subjects who led by Cuauhtémoc, the nephew of Moctezuma, wanted to attack the Spaniards. In light of the increasing unrest, the Aztec ruler advised his guests to leave while it was still safe, but Cortés argued that having no ships he could not return to Cuba. At the same time he received word that a Spanish fleet was nearing Vera Cruz. The fleet was commanded by Pánfilo de Narváez who was under the instructions of Governor Velásquez to return the *conquistador* to Cuba. It was a formidable force consisting of 18

[1] Albert Idell, Trans. and ed., *The Bernal Díaz Chronicles* (New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc. 1956), pp. 168-169.

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vessels and 800 soldiers, including 80 cavalry besides 1,000 Cuban Indians and 18 cannons. Cortés was left no choice but to leave the capital and meet the threat of his own countrymen.

Leaving his lieutenant, Pedro de Alvarado, in charge of the city with 80 Spaniards, Cortés quickly marched to Vera Cruz, where the forces of Narváez had gathered. Through a surprise attack he defeated Narváez shedding hardly a drop of blood. With promises of wealth and conquest he succeeded in gaining the loyalty of Narváez' followers thus giving him additional soldiers and supplies. His good fortune here was offset by a tragic event that was developing in Tenochtitlán.

Shortly after the departure of Cortés, Alvarado had consented to permit the Indians to have a religious festival. He had second thoughts after he saw the large number of Aztec nobility and spectators gathering in the square before the principal temple. Fearing an insurrection, about which he had reports, he ordered his troops to attack the people in the square. The result was an indiscriminate slaughter similar to the one in Cholula. His small force was no match for the rising indignation of the Aztecs against their foreign guests. Alvarado's last resource lay in Moctezuma's ability to pacify his vassals. It was during this crisis that Cortés returned to the capital. In his efforts to pacify the people he ordered the immediate release of Cuitláhuac, the brother of the emperor, with instructions to continue the disrupted religious festivity. Cuitláhuac took advantage of his freedom to rally support against the Spaniards. On June 25 he

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surrounded the city with his army, thereby cutting Cortés off from outside assistance. The Spanish commander made several unsuccessful efforts to break out of the trap, and in the end he was forced to have Moctezuma appear before his people asking for peace. Cuauhtémoc, the nephew of Moctezuma, publicly denounced the cowardness of his uncle and with his encouragement the Aztecs attacked their ruler. The assault inflicted a fatal wound on the emperor, leaving the Spaniards without their invaluable royal hostage. Cortés now was completely dependent on the resources of his men and Indian allies and there was nothing left but to break out of the trap by force. He made plans to leave the city secretly on the night of June 28, but the Aztecs quickly discovered the movements of Cortés' army and ordered an attack. The Spanish loaded down with armor and gold were no match for the light armed Indians, who vastly outnumbered the Spanish army. He broke the siege but not without paying a dear price with the death of 450 Spaniards, 4,000 Indian allies, 46 horses, all his cannon, much of his firearms and practically all of his treasure. Such was the fateful toll of *Noche Triste*. That he escaped at all was due to the fighting ability of his Tlaxcalan allies and the fact that Cuitláhuac did not pursue the badly mauled army of Cortés. He retreated by way of Tacuba on the western edge of Lake Texcoco and then marched around the northern edge of the lake to the valley of Otumba where he faced 100,000 Otumba warriors. This time good fortune was on his side when he succeeded in capturing the Indian banner and completely demoralized the

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enemy. A reported 20,000 Otumba Indians were killed whereas the Spanish losses were insignificant. According to William Prescott the battle of Otumba was one of the decisive battles of all history and demonstrated the valor and physical stamina of the Spaniards who having just escaped the *Noche Triste* had lost much of their superior equipment. The Otumba victory made his return to Tlaxcala even more welcome. The tragic *Noche Triste* whetted the Tlaxcalan's appetite for revenge upon the Aztecs. More good fortune awaited Cortés after his arrival in Tlaxcala when he received word that more men and supplies were arriving from Vera Cruz. The prospect of reconquering Tenochtitlán appeared brighter.

The Spanish leader's policy of conciliation and peaceful submission of the Aztec nation to his king was no longer possible. Never questioning the right of his conquest, he faced a situation similar to the one in Cholula. He felt compelled to invoke a violent conquest to achieve his end, even if it meant the destruction of Tenochtitlán, whose beauty and inhabitants he truly admired. The initial phase of the reconquest called for the subduing of various Indian tribes around Tenochtitlán, who were allies of the Aztecs. Essential to a successful conquest were his elaborate preparations to construct a navy at Texcoco on the eastern shore of Lake Texcoco. Cortés' strategy was to make his attack on Tenochtitlán an amphibious operation. The construction of the fleet would have been impossible without the help of Indian workers, especially from Texcoco and Tlaxcala. Not only

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was the commander dependent on their labor in this regard but his Indian allies supplied him and his army with food and temporary housing. As the conquest got under way, Indians provided invaluable help in repairing causeways and using their canoes in places where the larger brigantines were unable to enter. Finally Cortés found his faithful Indian allies indispensible in keeping his lines of communication with the coast open while he was engaged in taking Tenochtitlán. The construction of the brigantines was done under the supervision of Spanish soldiers, who proved themselves adept as carpenters, blacksmiths and builders. The skill of these men shows that they were more than soldiers and these were the very skills that were required when the soldier, after the fall of Tenochtitlán, became the colonizer.

While Cortés was preparing for the occupation of the Aztec capital, an epidemic of smallpox raged through the country. Aztecs and Indian allies fell to the dread disease, including the Aztec Emperor Cuitláhuac and Maxixcatzin, the king of the Tlaxcalans. Cuauhtémoc, the eleventh and last Aztec emperor succeeded to the throne. He was a bitter opponent of Moctezuma's vacillation policy and was more determined than ever to oppose the foreigners even at the point of death. The Spanish commander's last minute efforts at conciliation were doomed to failure with Cuauhtémoc's ascent to the Aztec throne.

Cortés concluded the preparations for the siege by May of 1521. It was an imposing force, which according to Francisco López de Gómera, the secretary of the captain, consisted of 200,000

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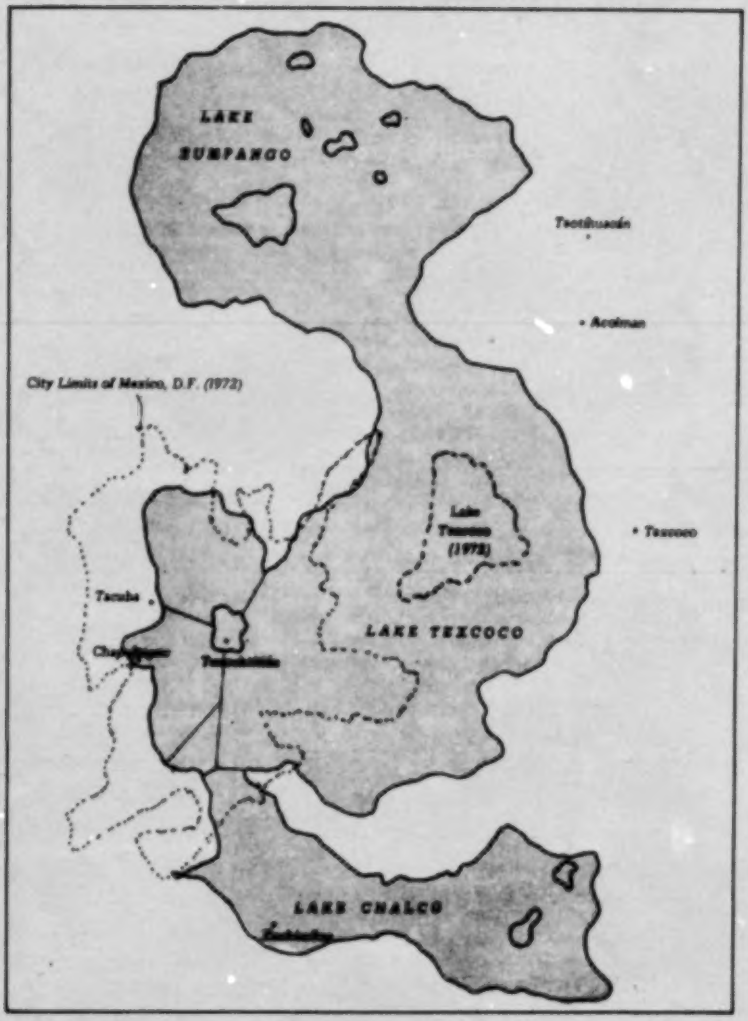

VALLEY OF MEXICO, A.D. 1519

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Indian allies, 900 Spaniards, 80 horses, 16 pieces of artillery, 13 brigantines and 6,000 canoes. He split his army into three divisions under the respective commands of Pedro de Alvarado, Cristóbal de Olid and Gonzalo de Sandoval. Each was to march towards Tenochtitlán on one of the three major causeways. In this way Cortés was able to cut off effectively the city from outside supplies, which included drinking water coming into the city by means of the aqueduct from Chapultepec. Before initiating the siege Cortés reminded the Spanish soldiers that the primary objective of the conquest was the conversion of the Indians; otherwise it was an unjust war and all spoils must be returned. He further stressed the need for order, discipline and good treatment of their Indian allies.

Having obtained the capitulation of a number of cities along the shores of Lake Texcoco and Lake Xochimilco the commander focused his attention on the capital. On June 28 he ordered a general attack on the city but he was repelled and almost captured by the Aztecs. After a series of failures to reach a truce with Cuauhtémoc, the commander ordered the destruction of the city. Since the enemy was using the top of the buildings to harass Cortés' army, he came to the reluctant conclusion that the beautiful city must be destroyed. The work of destruction was accompanied by bitter fighting, the spread of pestilence and famine. It was the bloodiest part of the entire conquest and finally came to an end on August 13 when Cuauhtémoc attempting to escape in a canoe was captured. The siege had lasted slightly more than seventy days. It is estimated that some 140,000

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Aztecs lost their lives of whom some 50,000 perished through disease. Cortés lost some 30,000 Indian allies and 50 Spaniards. The city was a heap of ashes. The destruction must have pained the Spanish governor who in the letters to the king could hardly find the words to describe the grandeur of the city. Now the *conquistador* must turn colonizer and he wasted no time in reconstructing the city.

REBUILDING OF TENOCHTITLAN

Cortés directed his first efforts at seeking the good will of his captured royal prisoner. Shortly after his capture, on meeting the Spanish conqueror, the Aztec commander declared that he had defended his people bravely but now he was at the complete mercy of his Spanish victor. The Spanish governor commended him for his courage and sent for his wife and followers. Unfortunately the good treatment of the royal prisoner was terminated when Spanish soldiers complained about not finding the expected treasures. They insisted that Cuauhtémoc had the treasure and wanted him tortured until he revealed the location. Cortés consented to torture but was forced to call a halt to the cruelties when Cuauhtémoc would reveal nothing. The infliction of torture was nothing unusual for the period, but he probably realized that to inflict torture on his royal prisoner was insulting to the Aztec leader and also reflected on Cortés' own name who sought good treatment of the Indians. He decided on another means to appease the desire for gold among his men. He organized a new expedition to various provinces in

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central Mexico, where hopefully treasures could be found that had escaped them in Tenochtitlán. These treasure hunting ventures resulted in speedy colonization of the area. In the meantime Cortés could set about the work of rebuilding Tenochtitlán.

The governor wasted no time in initiating the reconstruction of Tenochtitlán. It occupied the same place as the original one, with the *plaza mayor* or great square being located where before stood the palace and temple of Moctezuma. He repaired the aqueduct of Chapultepec to provide drinking water. Streets were widened and many of the old canals were filled up. The new architecture was more European than Indian, but the laboring force was mainly Indian and the imprint of their craftmanship is still in the buildings constructed during the colonial period. Work was started on the cathedral dedicated to St. Francis. Its location was on the site of the temple of the Aztec war god, Huitzilpochtli. The adobe brick of the Indian temple became the building stones for the Christian church. Opposite the cathedral on the plaza Cortés constructed his palace, which later became the residence of the Spanish viceroys who governed Mexico. He also provided for building a fortress, cannon foundries and the manufacture of gun powder to protect the city.

The soldiers of the *conquistador* along with the Aztec Indians and other loyal Indian followers became the first inhabitants of the city. The Spaniards received the choice site selections in the central part of the city whereas the Indians lived in outlying areas of the city. The governor

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encouraged Spanish settlements through liberal land grants and the use of the *repartimiento*, an institution that already was in existence in Cuba and Hispaniola. Through this institution the Spaniards were entitled to a designated number of Indian laborers. Periodically the Spanish crown issued directives regarding the use of the *repartimiento*. These covered regulations determining minimum wages, maximum hours of work and proper working conditions. Under Aztec domination the Indians were required to provide similar services. In general the Spanish settler did not use the system in such a way as to harm his Indian worker, but laxity of enforcement and the greed of some Spaniards led to frequent exploitation of Indian labor. Cortés' colonization push resulted in the settlement of some two thousand Spanish families during the early years following the fall of Tenochtitlán.

Along with the *repartimiento* the governor introduced the *encomienda* which already had been used in Hispaniola and Cuba. The Indians were considered free vassals of the crown and were required to pay taxes like any citizen of Spain. This obligation the Indian worker could fulfill by rendering services to an *encomendero*, the holder of an *encomienda*. The *encomendero* was the beneficiary of this work but in return he had the responsibility to maintain a good horse, weapons, and armor and stand ready to defend the crown's domain. At his own expense he was to provide for the general welfare of the Indians, especially the Christianization of those entrusted to him. The complete details of the system were spelled out by

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Cortés in his "Ordinances of Good Government" in 1524. Being far removed from royal authority the *encomendero* played the role of a feudal lord, who enjoyed criminal, civil and ecclesiastical jurisdiction. These extensive powers caused much conflict with civil and ecclesiastical officials.

Cortés' encouragement to bring Indian settlers into the city also proved very successful. He permitted the Indians to live under their own chiefs, who might be described as *barrio* bosses, and to enjoy many of their traditional Indian customs. In the Indian quarter churches, schools and hospitals were constructed. Within a few short years it is estimated that the Indian population may have numbered nearly thirty thousand. Early reports indicate a close relationship between the Indians and Spaniards, making for a very peaceful but picturesque confusion. The city was very much alive with the inhabitants engaged in varying types of occupation and trades. The industry of the inhabitants was very much in evidence in the two market places—one for the Spaniards and one for the Indians.

The first Spanish governor of Mexico did not confine his efforts solely to the capital. He was instrumental in the founding of settlements throughout central Mexico extending to the Pacific. He constructed a road from Vera Cruz to the capital. He encouraged settlement in these outlying areas through extending liberal land grants and municipal privileges to the Indians, which permitted a certain degree of local self government. Cortés was insistent that the

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Spanish settlers should bring their wives from Spain as soon as possible and those not married were required to pay a penalty if they were not married within a certain period of time. Obviously bachelorhood was too much of a luxury in a country that needed settlers. The governor's own wife, Doña Catalina Juárez from Cuba, was among the early wives to arrive shortly after the fall of Tenochtitlán. She lived only for a few months after her arrival, perhaps due to the fact that the high altitude of the capital was not suited to her constitution.

Cortés' solicitude in developing Mexico extended beyond the attracting of new settlers. The easy wealth about which many a *conquistador* dreamed was never realized. Although some mining was started during this early period, Cortés quickly realized that the true wealth of the country lay in agricultural production, a lesson that the Indians had made all too clear to their new conquerors. His letters to the king reflect his interest in developing agriculture. Frequently he entreated the crown to permit no ship to depart from Spain without a certain quantity of cattle and plants. He made it a condition for his land grants that the new settler must plant a certain number of seeds and must own his land for eight years before he could relinquish ownership. Permanent residence was one of the best means to create an interest in the soil and to develop it. The governor knew from experience that failure to plant permanent residences in the West Indies had proved harmful to agricultural development of that area. Fortunately many of the European

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grains that the governor introduced flourished well in the diversified climate of Mexico. From the neighboring islands he introduced sugar cane, indigo, cotton and cochineal which formed a productive staple product. Under the tropical sun European fruits like the peach, the almond, the orange, the vine and the olive flourished. These foods along with the Indian foods made for a diversity of diet that rivaled the best that Europe had to offer.

Cortés not only encouraged economic development of his domain but as a farmer of his estate in Cuernavaca, he set a model. On his *hacienda* he planted sugar cane, vines and cotton. As early as 1532 he was exporting cotton to Spain. He introduced cattle, horses and Merino sheep. He also developed silver mining and dreamed of starting a sea-borne trade in the Pacific—a venture that materialized after his death.

Cortés' concern for the Indians went beyond their material well being. He insisted that his conquest could never be justified if the primary goal of the Christianization of the Indians was neglected. The governor exhibited the human frailties of greed and debauchery. As a political leader he had few moral scruples. At the same time he was a man of deep religious convictions. These convictions are in evidence in his continuous concern for the spiritual well being of his new subjects. One may reproach him for his haste and force in bringing about conversions but never for laxness in Christianizing the Indians. His letters to the crown appeal frequently for the sending of holy religious men to work among the Indians. He

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made it clear he wanted no part of the Spanish clergy which was more interested in its own material well being than in the spiritual welfare of the Indians. He wanted men who would be living examples of their teachings. In compliance with this request, twelve Franciscan friars under the leadership of Father Martín of Valencia arrived early in 1524 to aid the important work of conversions, which Father Olmedo and other men had already started.

The arrival of the twelve Franciscans occasioned great festivities and the governor headed a procession to meet the friars at the gates of the city. On meeting them he bent his knee to the ground and kissed the hem of the clerical garb of the religious leader—a scene of humble submission that amazed the Indian subjects. The friars lost no time in beginning their work. First through interpreters and later through knowledge of the various Indian tongues, the missionaries proved their true value in conversions, building schools, orphanages and hospitals. Here one must especially note the name of Pedro de Gante, who laid the educational foundation for colonial Mexico. The friars in their zeal for conversions destroyed Indian temples and priceless treasures which were associated with Indian pagan worship. At the same time the early missionaries proved themselves zealous scholars in recording the life and history of their newly converted subjects. A case in point is the invaluable work on the ancient Aztecs by Bernardino Sahagún, an early Franciscan missionary. One can legitimately question the thoroughness of many of these

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conversions, but it is difficult to question the urgent concern of the governor as reflected in the work of the early missionaries.

In his role of colonizer one can clearly detect the outstanding traits of Cortés. He showed his love for rebuilding Mexico, never losing sight of the interests of the Indians. He desired to raise their standard of living and incorporate them into his enterprise. He respected many of the Indian institutions, which he sought to retain and improve. Successful colonization also meant the attraction of Spanish settlers. He desired to inspire in his countrymen the same love he felt for his newly adopted land and make them forget their fatherland. This sense of patriotism for Mexico has a very modern ring but it was the heart of his rebuilding program.

NEW CONQUESTS

Although Cortés had been elected governor by his own men in 1519, no official confirmation of the title had arrived from the crown by the time Tenochtitlán fell. His enemies, jealous of his success, constantly bombarded the Spanish court with appeals not to recognize Cortés as governor. Governor Velásquez of Cuba and Pánfilo Narváez urged that Cristóbal de Tapia be named governor of the newly conquered territory. Fortunately, the *conquistador* had his friends at court who ably defended him against the accusations of Governor Velásquez. He obtained the official title of governor and captain general on October 15, 1522.

The life of governor was ill suited to this man of action. He dreamed of extending his domain

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southward into Central America and finding the strait leading to the Pacific Ocean. He sent Cristóbal de Olid with five ships and 400 soldiers to Honduras but the expedition ended in failure when Olid joined forces with Governor Velásquez and refused to recognize the authority of Cortés. In order to punish the rebel leader, the governor organized his own expedition and left Mexico City on October 12, 1524, with a large Spanish army and Indian allies, including Cuauhtémoc.

From the capital he moved to Tabasco and from there he crossed heavy jungle areas, swamps and high mountains. All along the way he was beset with insects, disease, wild life and hostile Indian tribes. Along with these obstacles he received word that Cuauhtémoc and some Indians were plotting against him. The allegations of conspiracy resulted in the execution of the Aztec king on February 25, 1525. Cortés penetrated into Honduras, where he received word of the capture and death of Olid. After laying the foundations of a colony, he returned to Tenochtitlán a year and a half after he had begun the ill-fated journey. He was so emaciated by disease during the arduous journey that he was hardly recognized on his return to the capital on June 20, 1526.

During his absence his appointed governors of the city quarreled among themselves, causing much turmoil throughout the entire region. Indians and Spaniards alike lined streets welcoming the return of their governor, who they hoped could bring about a rule of peace and justice. The restoration of stability in the valley of Mexico City became more difficult when the enemies of

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Cortés continued their plotting at the royal court with the hope of having him removed as governor. The charges against Cortés included the traditional one that he was concealing the treasures of Moctezuma and therefore not giving the king his share. A very telling charge was the one accusing Cortés of attempting to set up an independent government. Neither charge could be substantiated but the latter one did confirm royal suspicions and the immediate result was the suspension of Cortés' powers as governor.

The crown named Luis Ponce de León as interim governor, who arrived in Mexico City on July 2, 1526. Although unjustly accused, Cortés gave his full submission to the new governor, who died shortly after his arrival and was replaced by Marcos de Aguilar. Aguilar and his successor Alonso de Estrada proved themselves very vindictive towards Cortés and in desperation the *conquistador* decided to return to Spain to present his side of the story to the crown. It is to the credit of Cortés that with his popular following among the Indians and Spaniards he did not attempt to stir up a rebellion among his former subjects to defend his interests.

On the eve of his departure Cortés received word that the crown was planning to replace the military government in Mexico with a civilian one. Accordingly the crown appointed an *audiencia* with executive and judicial powers. This body proved to be as inimical to Cortés as the previously appointed governors. Again members of the *audiencia* raised charges of Cortés defrauding the crown and seeking to make himself king of the new

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land. In spite of these accusations the *conquistador's* reception at the royal court was most cordial. He received the title of Marqués del Valle de Oaxaca together with extensive land grants but the coveted title of governor of Mexico was not restored. He was encouraged to continue his explorations into Central America and a vague commission to serve as governor over any newly claimed lands. The crown was obviously interested in extending the boundaries of its empire, but did not fully trust the man who wanted to be governor over what he discovered and conquered.

Failing to fully recover all of his lost powers Cortés did succeed in contracting a marriage with Juana de Zúñiga, daughter of the Count de Aguilar and niece of the Duke of Béjar, both of whom were of socially prominent families in Spain. This was a considerable step upwards on the nobility ladder in Spain for the man from Estremadura whose noble rank in no way matched the social standing of these two families. Furthermore it could provide needed influential friends at court in his continuing controversies with the *audiencia* of New Spain. His new social status was very much in evidence when he returned to Mexico on July 15, 1530, with his wife and an imposing retinue of followers. His sojourn in Spain had lasted two years.

During the governor's absence Nuño de Guzmán who headed the *audiencia* misruled the country causing much unrest and turmoil. Cortés on his return did not go to the capital in order to avoid further unrest especially among the Indians, who might seek his aid to rectify the wrongs. Instead

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he retired to his estate in Cuernavaca, where he busied himself with developing grandiose plans including the conquest of the Spice Islands and the old Columbus dream of bringing China into the Spanish empire. The political climate improved with the appointment of new members to the *audiencia* who were more sympathetic to the complaints of their subjects. Although they were more disposed to hear the grievances of Cortés, they were not willing to extend any political authority to him that might weaken their own authority. Undoubtedly the unchanged political situation must have greatly influenced his decision to set out on an expedition to the coast of Jalisco, which led to the discovery of the peninsula of California. His hopes of becoming governor of this newly found area never materialized. The crown declared the area of Lower California to be part of the viceroyalty of Mexico and immediately proceeded to appoint Antonio de Mendoza as viceroy of New Spain, as Mexico was then called. The new viceroy arrived in 1535.

When the new viceroy immediately extended his jurisdiction over the new claims of Cortés, the *conquistador* again felt it necessary to return to Spain to defend his interests. This time he met only coldness and indifference and he became embittered by the crown's refusal to hear his grievances. Like Columbus he became convinced that the king never fully appreciated his services. As a last resort to attract the crown's attention, he accompanied the emperor on a crusade against Argel, a Moslem stronghold in North Africa, but it ended in failure. After six years of such

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misfortunes he decided to return to his beloved Mexico to retire to his estate in Cuernavaca.

END OF HIS CAREER

The preparations for his return to Mexico had to be abandoned because of growing physical infirmity. Realizing his end near, he retired to Castilleja de la Cuesta near Seville and spent his final days in a spiritual re-evaluation of his life's work. His letter to Charles dated February 3, 1544, stated his concern with balancing his account with God and indicated that he was more concerned over losing his soul than his fortune. Although the *conquistador* and colonizer of Mexico had committed many acts in the name of religion which are difficult to defend by present day standards, one cannot overlook the strong religious motivation in his behavior. Further evidence of his religiosity can be seen in his final will which set aside money for the founding of a hospital, a monastery and college for priesthood students and for instructing Indians in Christianity. The will provided for the saying of masses in all the churches and monasteries, as many as possible on the day of his burial and in addition five thousand more on successive days in the following manner:

> "One thousand for the souls in purgatory, two thousand for the souls of those who lost their lives serving under me in the discovery and conquest of New Spain and the remaining two thousand for the souls of all those toward whom I have obligations of which I am ignorant or forgetful. . . .My executors shall recompense the five thousand masses according to customs, and I beg of them in all that concerns my funeral to suppress all worldly pomp and devote it rather to the good of souls."[2]

[2]Charles S. Braden, *Religious Aspects of the Conquest of Mexico* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1930), p.79.

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The end to his long and colorful career came in his sixty-third year on December 2, 1547.

In accordance with his desire of returning to Mexico, his remains were buried in the church of St. Francis in Mexico City and from here they were once more changed to the Church of Jesus in the same city, where they remained until 1823. Outbursts of anti-Spanish sentiment that accompanied the Mexican independence movement caused the bones to be removed to the Church of Jesus the Nazarene in Mexico City for greater security. During subsequent revolutionary turmoil the remains were again moved. Even the remains of the restless man could find no rest in the land he helped to found and colonize. The picture of the *conquistador* as destroyer and exploiter has haunted him down to the present day. Ironic as it may sound, Mexico has honored Cuauhtémoc with statues, but it has been very reluctant to extend a similar honor to Cortés.

Although history has been cruel to Cortés, his imprint in Mexican history remains indelible. There are few today who are convinced of the justice of the conquest as was Cortés. The question of conquest being just or unjust was in Cortés' mind an academic question for theologians to debate. For him the Christianization of the Indian justified the taking of Mexico. But this is only a small part of the legacy that Cortés left to his adopted land. His coming to Mexico gave birth to the *mestizo* which constitutes the vast majority of Mexico today and at the same time is the ancestor of the Mexican American in the Southwest. His destruction of Tenochtitlán was

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for the *conquistador* a regrettable necessity which he hoped to undo by laying the foundation for present day Mexico City. His rebuilding of the land he conquered was everywhere in evidence in the towns he built. Similarly his concern for the well-being of his subjects was exemplified in the government he set up, the new agricultural products and cattle he introduced from Spain and the mining he started.

Neither was he oblivious of the contributions the Indians made. Although he had no sympathy for the pagan Indian religions, he saw the need for the preservation of Indian legal and social institutions, agricultural products, crafts and customs. It was not only the birth of a racial *mestizo* but also of a cultural *mestizo*. His recognition of the Indian as a human being and citizen of Spain was not always shared by his contemporaries in theory or practice. Cortés himself undoubtedly did not always honor the principle in practice and he must have recalled his sins in these matters frequently during his final days of spiritual reckoning. Despite his many human shortcomings, the final verdict in his treatment of the Indians is in favor of Cortés. According to Ramón Iglesia the accusation that Cortés was merely a tyrant bent on enriching himself does not stand up in face of the historical evidence that he had won the love and confidence of the Indians. Is this not the highest honor to which he could have aspired?

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Suggested Reading for Secondary
and Elementary Students

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Collis, Maurice. *Cortés and Conquest of Mexico.* New York: Harcourt Brace Co., 1955. (elementary)

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AUDIOVISUAL AID MATERIALS

Beginnings of Exploration — C 14 Min
MP0019 — 1-J
Describes the first stages in Europe's expansion—the growth of trade and rise of a strong merchant class, the scientific awakening to new ideas about man and his world, and Portugal's leading the way in exploration to lay a foundation for a great colonial empire. From the age of exploration series.
Producer—Encyclopedia Britannica
Distributor—Encyclopedia Britannica Films Educational Corp. 1965

The Spanish Explorers — C 14 Min
MP0235 — 1—S
Uses live action photography, paintings and animation to depict the discovery of America through the eyes of Spanish explorers. Discusses Spain's reasons for exploration and shows the conquests of Cortés, Pizzaro and others in the New World. From the age of exploration series.
Producer—Coronet Films
Distributor—Coronet Films. 1967

Cortés
col 49 fr EBF 60SS gr 5-6; Geog gr 7 For Lang Spanish Sec
Shows and tells why Cortés came to Mexico, how he subdues Indians, routes covered, how he conquered Aztec Empire, Cortés' battle with Narváez how his conquest helped Spain, death of Cortés.

Cortés and the Aztecs
col 35 fr Gunter 57SS gr 4-6 For Lang Spanish Sec
Drawings and maps describe the conquest of the Aztecs by Hernán Cortés in 1519 and the settlement of Mexico by the Spanish.

(Note: These last two are filmstrips.)